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Slaying of C.I.A. Aide Stirs Debate on 'Leaks'

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 3—The killing of Richard S. Welch, the Central Intelligence Agency's chief in Athens who was shot by gunmen there Dec. 23, has intensified a debate over the extent to which disclosures by Congressional committees and critics of the C.I.A. have damaged the agency's overseas operations and endangered employees.

Recent revelations that the C.I.A. has been funneling arms and money to anti-Communist factions in Angola and Portugal, despite assurances from President Ford that the investigations had made such covert intervention impossible for the moment, indicate that at least some of the C.I.A.'s traditional modes of operation have been little affected by the publicity.

Of more importance is the question whether the murder of Mr. Welch was a result of the recent publication of the identities of dozens of C.I.A. operatives, including the late Mr. Welch, by official and unofficial sources.

Athens Paper Printed Identity

The name of Mr. Welch, the first C.I.A. officer killed since the current investigations began and the highest-ranking of the 32 said to have met that fate, was included in a list of C.I.A. officials living in Greece that was published in an Athens newspaper about a month before he was shot.

Where the newspaper obtained the names is unclear. But some officials including

William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, were quick to note that Mr. Welch and other C.I.A. station chiefs were identified in a recent issue of Counter-Spy, a magazine put out by a small group that says it is dedicated to reforming the C.I.A.

Though there is no apparent connection between Counter-Spy and the Athens murder, the question of whether such publicity does endanger lives seems certain to persist over the next few months. The Senate Intelligence Committee, which has already named some C.I.A. officials, is expected to identify others, and Counter-Spy has also said it will do likewise in its February issue.

Some Legislative Effects

Counter-spy is a publication of the organizing committee for the Fifth Estate, a small group of low-level American intelligence operatives and others associated with the anti-Vietnam war movement.

The committee depends on sales of the magazine and individual contributions to finance its activities, which it says are directed at exposing covert American intelligence activities against leftist groups and Governments.

The murder of Mr. Welch may well have some effects in law. There has been a report that the C.I.A. is planning to cite the murder in lobbying Congress for less stringent legislative restraints on national security activities than the House and Senate investigating

committees are likely to propose.

Representative Robert H. Michel of Illinois, the House Republican whip, has said he will introduce legislation making it a Federal crime to publish the true identity of any American intelligence agent working under cover.

Underlying the debate surrounding Mr. Welch's murder is the reality that much about the clandestine services, the secret side of the C.I.A., is not very secret and that the style of life and responsibilities of a C.I.A. station chief assigned to a foreign capital are more than a little revealing of his true role.

The disclosure of a C.I.A. station chief's identity is not a recent event.

Before going to Athens, for example, Mr. Welch headed the C.I.A. station in Lima, Peru, where less than a year ago a daily newspaper reportedly revealed his agency relationship. American correspondents stationed in India in the early 1960's remember the name of Harry A. Rositzke, then chief of station in New Delhi, appearing in a left-wing publication named Blitz.

Some Are in 'Deep Cover'

The C.I.A.'s covert operatives fall into two general categories, those who work under "deep cover" and others including all of the agency's high and middle-level executives like Mr. Welch, whose cover is considerably less shrouded.

The deep-cover agents, of whom there are perhaps 500,

are extremely well-protected. Their bogus identities, which include posing as business executives, importers and freelance journalists, are carefully developed and nurtured and difficult to penetrate.

So far as is known, only one deep-cover C.I.A. operative has been publicly exposed in the last two years, and not in connection with the current investigations.

C.I.A. officers working under the far more "official" cover can pose as employees of nearly any Federal agency, but most often pass themselves off, like Mr. Welch and nearly all other station chiefs, as members of the diplomatic delegation to the countries in which they are stationed.

A C.I.A. station chief in a foreign capital is almost always identified as a medium-to-high ranking diplomat in the State Department's Biographic Register and its Foreign Service list of personnel assigned to overseas posts.

But even those documents contain clues—almost unmistakable to the trained eye—to his real identity.

The State Department refuses to classify C.I.A. personnel working under diplomatic cover as regular Foreign Service officers, but instead designates them as reserve officers. According to some, this is a touch of diplomatic snobbery. But more likely it is because, as one departmental official suggested recently, diplomatic cover was never intended as a "significant" disguise.

Curbs on Information

The current Biographic Register, which a State Department spokesman said might not be reissued because of new legislation limiting the personal information that can be published about Government officials, lists Mr. Welch as an RU-3, or third-class reserve officer, unlimited.

The Foreign Service list, whose publication is not expected to be affected by the Privacy Act, as the new law

is called, will continue to carry such designations.

Past editions of the list, in addition to showing Mr. Welch as an RU-3 international relations officers at his previous post in Peru, have listed Mr. Colby himself, while head of the pacification program in Vietnam in the late 1960's, as an R-1, and William K. Harvey, the C.I.A. station chief in Rome a decade ago, as an R-2 political officer.

The list, published three times a year, is not all-inclusive, however, perhaps deliberately so. The June 1974 issue, for example, contains the name of David E. Murphy, then the station chief in Paris, who is listed as an R-1 special assistant to the Ambassador, but has no mention of Cord Meyer, then

chief of the London station.

Not all reserve officers are C.I.A. employees. But that designation, along with a career history that includes overseas assignments exclusively to an embassy's political or economic staff, "furloughs" to other Government agencies and unexplained lapses in diplomatic postings is a fair indication of involvement in intelligence work.